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SIPDIS

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CENTCOM FOR CSTC-A
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OSD FOR SHIVERS
COMMERCE FOR DEES, CHOPPIN, AND FONOVICH

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SUBJECT: SPANTA ON TALIBAN TALKS

11. On October 9, FM Spanta convened the diplomatic corps, ostensibly to discuss the upcoming ECO conference to be held in Herat, but in reality to announce the government's position on talks with the Taliban.

Spanta said that the government intended to invite contacts with elements of the Taliban who were willing to recognize the authority of the government and return to peaceful life. He made clear that there were some members of the Taliban with whom the government would not engage, nor would it engage with Al-Qaeda. Spanta repeated President Karzai's distinction between "hard core" Taliban and others. He stressed that the government would not negotiate or compromise with terrorism. He said that the engagement "was not to be seen as a sign of weakness, on the part of the government or its international partners.

12. Comment. This formal announcement to the diplomatic corps was the next step in a larger effort by the government to respond to selected Taliban overtures and take acceptable Taliban elements off the battlefield.

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